

## AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A method for separating letters in which irregularly spaced and disordered piles of letters that are being transported on a conveyor belt (1) are rendered into a continuous stream of letters that are largely not lying on top of each other and that are distributed virtually homogeneously over the conveyor belt (1),

~~characterized in that,~~ the method comprising rotating

at least one retention plate (15) affixed at an axis of rotation (12) in a radial orientation with respect thereto ~~rotates~~ around the axis of rotation (12) that is arranged crosswise to ~~the~~ a conveying direction of the conveyor belt (1), horizontally and above the conveyor belt (1) in such a way that ~~the~~ a retention plate (15) situated below the axis of rotation (12) has a speed component in a direction ~~that is opposite~~ opposed to the conveying direction of the conveyor belt (1).

2. (Currently Amended) The method according to Claim 1,

~~characterized in that~~ comprising rotating

several retention plates (15, 15') ~~rotate~~ around the axis of rotation (12).

3. (Currently Amended) The method according to ~~one or more of the preceding~~ claims,

~~characterized in that~~ claim 1, comprising varying

the distance between the axis of rotation (12) and the conveyor belt (1) ~~is varied~~.

4. (Currently Amended) A device for separating letters that renders irregularly spaced and disordered piles of letters that are being transported on a conveyor belt (1) into a continuous stream of letters that are largely not lying on top of each other and that are distributed virtually homogeneously over the conveyor belt (1),

~~characterized in that, the device comprising~~

~~it has~~ an axis of rotation (12) that is arranged crosswise to the a conveying direction of a conveyor belt (1), horizontally and above the conveyor belt (1), and one or more retention plates (15, 15') ~~that are~~ affixed at the axis of rotation (12) in a radial orientation with respect thereto and ~~that rotate~~ rotatable around said axis of rotation (12), ~~whereby~~ wherein the rotating retention plates (15, 15') can be driven in such a way that, in at least one operating state of the device, they have a speed component that is opposite to the conveying direction of the conveyor belt (1) whenever they are below the axis of rotation (12).

5. (Currently Amended) The device according to Claim 4,

~~characterized in that~~ wherein

~~the~~ angular distances between the retention plates (15, 15') are the same.

6. (Currently Amended) The device according to ~~one or both of Claims~~ Claim 4 and 5,

~~characterized in that,~~ wherein

one or more of the retention plates (15') has a smaller extension in the radial direction relative to the axis of rotation (12) than at least one other retention plate (15).

7. (Currently Amended) The device according to ~~one or more of Claims~~ Claim 4  
~~to 6,~~

~~characterized in that,~~ wherein

an end piece (16) of at least one of the retention plates (15) is configured elastically in  
alignment with the radius relative to the rotational movement of the retention plates (15, 15').